



The President's Daily Brief

20 October 1972

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

20 October 1972

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

There are new indications that the Communists intend to increase the level of military action in many areas of South Vietnam. (Page 1)

We now have the text of the Communist plan for ending the war in Laos--the most comprehensive and forthcoming ever--that was offered by the chief Communist negotiator on Tuesday. (Page 3)

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(Page 5)

The naming of George Macovescu as Romania's new foreign minister brings new verve to the post, but does not indicate a shift in foreign policy. (Page 6)

The Chilean Government is continuing its crackdown on striking business and professional groups, but some opposition leaders are seeking to keep the protests going. (Page 7)

Icelandic Foreign Minister Agustsson has told parliament that negotiations with Washington on the status of US forces in Iceland will begin in January. (Page 7)

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VIETNAM

There are new indications that the Communists intend to increase the level of military action in many sectors of South Vietnam in the immediate future.

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The evidence suggests that a new surge of attacks could be fairly well coordinated and include actions in the northern provinces, as well as a substantial effort near Saigon and in the delta. It appears that the primary objectives in the southern parts of the country will continue to be the major roads and waterways, as well as remote and lightly defended urban centers. It is also likely that rocket and sapper attacks against major cities, including Da Nang and Saigon, are included

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Saigon is well aware of the reports of enemy intentions and is taking defensive precautions. Moreover, South Vietnamese units have been cautious about over-extending themselves in the event the Communists should try to cut them off and force a battle under undesirable conditions.

Some portions of the enemy plan have doubtless been pre-empted

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Thus, a new Communist campaign would not be of the magnitude of the enemy's effort last spring. Rather, the enemy presumably plans a less intense attack that it hopes will have significant political impact on the South Vietnamese Government and on the peace talks.

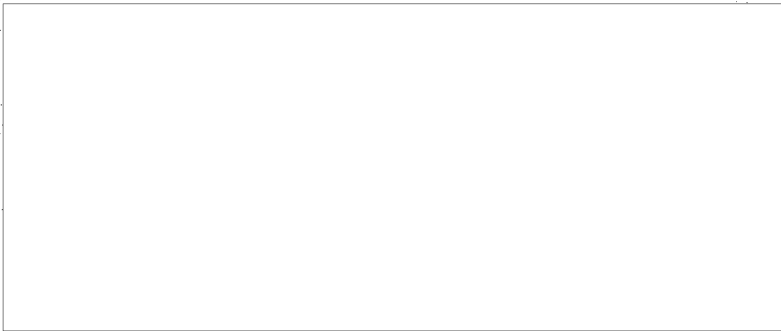
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LAOS

We now have the text of the Communist plan for ending the war in Laos--the most comprehensive and forthcoming ever offered by the Communists. Chief negotiator Phoune Sipraseuth on Tuesday discussed in detail the mechanics for proceeding with the Communist Five-Point Peace Proposals of March 1970. He indicated clearly for the first time that the Communists would expect a place for their Lao neutralist allies--as well as themselves--to join with pro-government elements in a "Provisional Government of National Coalition." This should be set up "in the immediate future." Phoune also called for the creation of a broadly based "council" to prepare for the election of a new national assembly and for the establishment of a permanent "Government of National Union."

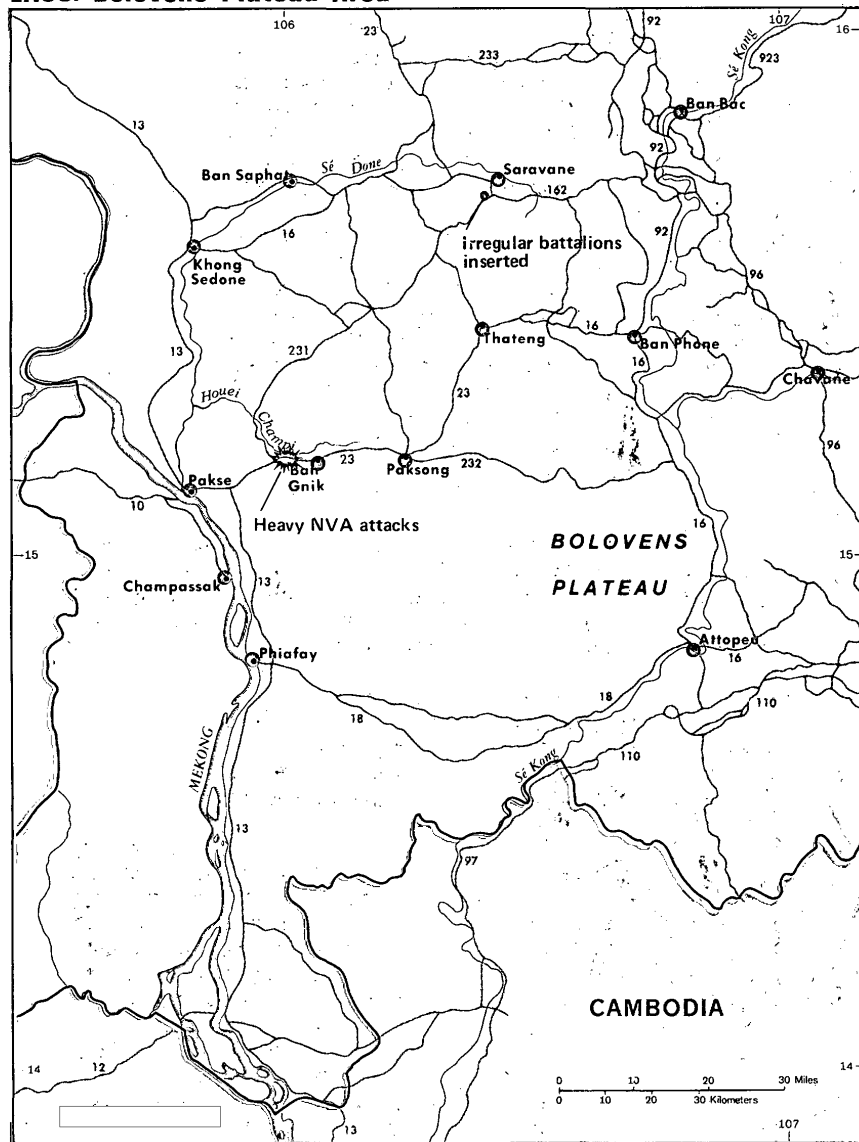
This scenario parallels Viet Cong demands for a greater share of political power in South Vietnam and presumably represents the current Communist estimate of how best to achieve that objective in both countries.

Phoune repeated Communist demands that, as a precondition to a settlement, the US must stop the bombing and end all other forms of military involvement. He added that a bombing halt must be accompanied by a simultaneous "cease-fire in place."

In contrast to previous statements, however, the Communists do not demand that these conditions be met before agreements can be reached on other matters, such as preparation for an interim government. Again, in keeping with the Vietnamese Communist approach, the statement also held out the possibility of an exchange of prisoners of war "of all nationalities." The Lao Communists have acknowledged that they hold some US prisoners.

The high rank and experience of the Lao Communist negotiating team and its businesslike attitude suggest a serious intent to move the talks forward. The Communists' apparent flexibility on the timing of a bombing halt and a cease-fire indicates that they will be content to focus first

LAOS: Bolovens Plateau Area



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- Government-held location
- Communist-held location

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on less contentious political questions. Even though they have raised some points that the government will find hard to accept, their latest proposals allow considerable room for discussion.

The Communists may see several advantages in trying to negotiate seriously. They have, thus far, repelled the government's efforts to regain vital lost territory. If Souvanna eventually rejects their demands and the talks collapse, they will, at least, have not lost anything militarily and could then choose to increase the pace of the war. If, on the other hand, some progress is made on political matters, the Communists may believe it will be harder for Souvanna to resist calling for a bombing halt. Souvanna's position is that any bombing halt must be accompanied by a supervised withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from Laos--a key issue that was ignored in the Communist plan.

In any case, Souvanna is anxious to keep the talks going even though he is scheduled to depart at the end of this week on a three-week trip to France and the US.

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The next session is scheduled for 24 October.

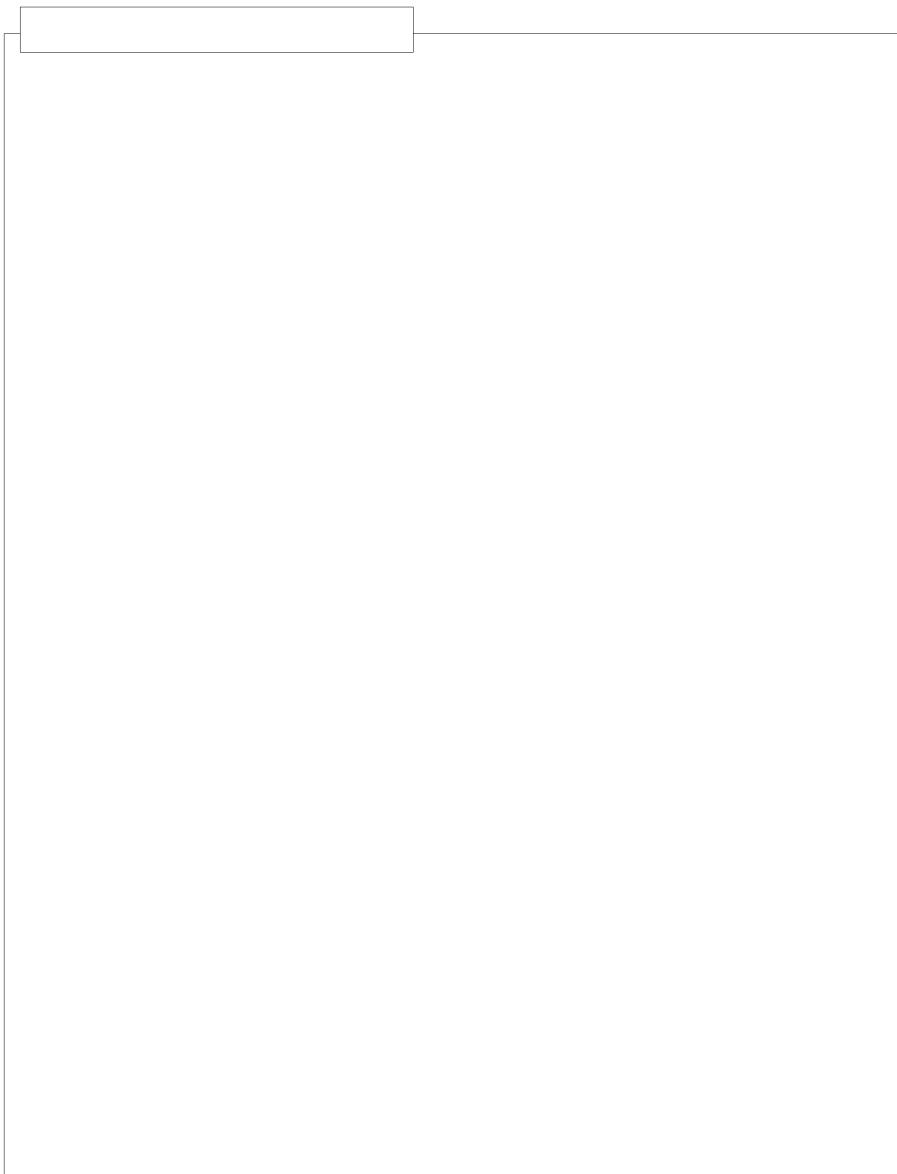
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The government yesterday launched a major new offensive in the south. Advance elements of an eight-battalion irregular force were airlifted to positions just southwest of Saravane, which the Communists have controlled since late last year. The government objective is to take Saravane and push south to regain a foothold on the Bolovens Plateau. Meanwhile, at the western edge of the Bolovens, Communist forces, supported by tanks and heavy weapons, attacked irregular units near the junction of Routes 23 and 231.

The Communist attack appears designed to forestall any government push eastward toward Paksong, and possibly also to divert some government troops from the new offensive against Saravane.

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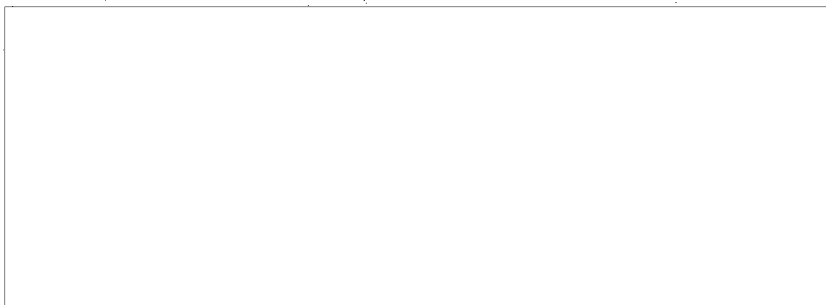
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CHINA



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ROMANIA

Corneliu Manescu has been replaced as foreign minister by his first deputy, George Macovescu.

We expect Manescu, after more than a decade as foreign minister, to retain an important advisory role in Bucharest. President Ceausescu may well name him a member of the Council of State.

Macovescu, a leading expert on European security matters, has promoted the coming Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in his frequent foreign travels. He will bring new verve to the post, but the change does not mean a shift in Romanian foreign policy.

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NOTES

Chile: The government is continuing to crack down on striking business and professional groups. Many stores and schools are open, and food and fuel supplies are increasing. Police have replaced army troops guarding important installations, and street violence has diminished. Some opposition leaders are seeking to keep the protests going, however, and the bus companies have now voted to strike, reversing an earlier promise to stay on the job. Some white-collar unions also decided to join the strike today.

Iceland: Foreign Minister Agustsson has told parliament that negotiations with Washington on the status of US forces in Iceland will begin in January. In discussing this matter with Ambassador Irving, Agustsson claimed that he is under extreme domestic political pressure to get the talks started soon. Moreover, by announcing the intention to take up this issue, he presumably hopes to divert public attention from concessions that Iceland may have to make in its fishing dispute with the UK.

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